

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (previously presented) A framed sheet for use in manufacturing a microelectronic component comprising:

(a) a frame having an aperture and a structure;

(b) a flexible sheet having oppositely-facing exterior surfaces and a first metallic layer at a first said exterior surface, a main region of said sheet extending across said aperture, said first exterior surface of said flexible sheet being bonded to said structure so that said frame holds said sheet in tension, said frame further having at least one contact opening extending through said structure, said sheet including at least one contact region aligned with said contact opening whereby said first metallic layer is exposed at said contact opening for engagement with an electrical contact during processing, the bond between the sheet and the structure including an inner bond region in the vicinity of said contact opening so that said inner bond region mechanically isolates the contact region from said main region of said sheet, whereby engagement of said electrical contact with said contact region of said sheet will not cause deformation of said main region.

2. (original) A framed sheet as claimed in claim 1 wherein said structure of said frame is at least partially formed from a dielectric material.

3. (original) A framed sheet as claimed in claim 1 wherein said aperture has an external shape generally in the form of a polygon, said at least one contact opening including a plurality of contact openings disposed adjacent corners of said polygon.

4. (original) A framed sheet as claimed in claim 3 wherein said polygon is rectangular.

5. (original) A framed sheet as claimed in claim 1 wherein said at least one contact opening includes at least one slot extending outwardly from said aperture, and wherein said

inner bond region includes bonded regions bordering each such slot.

6. (original) A framed sheet as claimed in claim 1 wherein said at least one contact opening includes at least one hole extending through said structure, so that said inner bond region includes a bonded region disposed between each such hole and said aperture.

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14. (previously presented) An article for use in manufacturing a microelectronic component comprising:

(a) a flexible sheet having oppositely-facing exterior surfaces; and

(b) a frame having an aperture and a structure, and having a mounting surface with inner edges bounding said aperture and outer edges remote from said aperture, said flexible sheet being bonded to said mounting surface so that said frame holds said sheet in tension and so that an exterior surface of said sheet is exposed through said aperture, said sheet being sealed to said mounting surface over an entirety of said edges of said mounting surface.

15. (original) An article as claimed in claim 14 wherein said sheet is sealed to said mounting surface over essentially the entire mounting surface so that there are essentially no gaps between the sheet and the mounting surface.

16. (previously presented) An article for use in manufacturing a microelectronic component comprising:

(a) a flexible sheet having oppositely-facing exterior surfaces;

(b) a frame having an aperture and a structure, and having a mounting surface facing in a forward direction with an inner edge bounding said aperture, said structure including an inner edge surface intersecting said mounting surface at said inner edge and extending rearwardly away from said mounting surface, said flexible sheet being bonded to said mounting surface so that said frame holds said sheet in tension, so that a first exterior surface of said sheet overlies said mounting surface and so that said first exterior surface of said sheet is exposed through said aperture, said sheet being sealed to said mounting surface at least along said inner edge of said mounting surface; and

(c) a fillet joining said first exterior surface of said sheet and said inner edge surface.

17. (original) An article as claimed in claim 16 wherein said frame has a rear surface extending generally parallel to said mounting surface adjacent said inner edge, said rear surface being less than about 10mm from said mounting surface at said inner edge.

18. (original) An article as claimed in claim 17 wherein said frame has a radius joining said rear surface and said inner edge surface.

19. (original) An article as claimed in claim 16 herein said inner edge surface slopes outwardly, away from said inner edge.

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